

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 TUNIS 00322 181325Z

43

ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03

SS-20 USIA-15 IO-14 DRC-01 SAJ-01 AID-20 /157 W

----- 013596

R 181205Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4234

INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY RABAT

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 322

E.O. 11652: ;GDS

TAGS: PINT' TS

SUBJ: NOUIRA-MASMOUDI FOREIGN PRESS FEUD THREATENS

TO ESCALATE INTO POWER STRUGGLE.

REF: TUNIS 290

1. SUMMARY: LATEST MASMOUDI PRESS REVELATION (N.Y. TIMES
AND LE MONDE) THAT BOURGUIBA SIGNED MERGER AGREEMENT WHEN
HE MET ALONE WITH QADHAFI JAN 12, (I.E. THREE HOURS BEFORE
SIGNING CEREMONY) REPORTEDLY RESULTED IN NOUIRA AND PSD
POL BUREAU WARNING TO MASMOUDI JAN 17 TO STOP SEEING PRESS.
MASMOUDI PLANS IGNORE WARNING AND SCHEDULED GRANT
INTERVIEWS AFP AND REUTERS NON-RESIDENT CORRESPONDENTS
MORNING JAN 18. NOUIRA AT SAME TIME HAS CONVOKED NY
TIMES AND LE MONDE CORRESPONDENTS IN APPARENT ATTEMPT
RECTIFY DAMAGE. BOURGUIBA, WHO HAS GRANTED NO PRESS
INTERVIEWS IN SPITE OF MANY REQUESTS, EXPECTED DEPART
QUIETLY FOR GENEVA JAN 19. IF MASMOUDI GOES AHEAD WITH
INTERVIEWS AS SCHEDULED BELIEVE HE WILL BE IN SERIOUS
TROUBLE HERE. HOWEVER SANCTIONS MAY NOT BE TAKEN
UNTIL AFTER BOURGUIBA LEAVES FOR GENEVAGP PUBLIC RACTION
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 TUNIS 00322 181325Z

TO POSSIBLE SANCTIONS AGAINST MASMOUDI, WHO STILL ASST

SEC. GEN. OF PSD IN CHARGE OF PARTY PRESS, DIFFICULT TO ESTIMATE AT THIS TIME. RECENT REPORTS BY FOREIGN PRESS, INCLUDING DEPARTMENT STATEMENT, MAY HELP DISCOUNT EARLY ALLEGATIONS US INVOLVED IN MASMOUDI OUSTER. CURRENT NOUIRA-MASMOUDI FEUD THREATENS BREAK WIDE OPEN WITH POSSIBLE REPERCUSSIONS ON INTERNAL SCENE, PARTICULARLY AFTER BOURGUIBA LEAVES COUNTRY. END SUMMARY.

2. CHRONOLOGY OF STATEMENTS AND EVENTS AS BEST WE CAN DETERMINE IS AS FOLLOWS:

(A) NOUIRA TOLD RANDAL OF WASHINGTON POST AFTERNOON JAN 16 THAT BOURGUIBA REMOVED MASMOUDI BECAUSE HE WENT TOO FAR IN FORCING BOURGUIBA'S HAND ON MERGER, THIS CONTRADICTED PRESS STATEMENT BY FONMIN CHATTI THAT REMOVAL HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH MERGER.

(B) MINISTRY OF INFORMATION ATTEMPTED TO KILL THIS PART OF STORY IN FRENCH LANGUAGE VERSIONS OF WIRE SERVICES.

(C) LATER EVENING JAN 16, MASMOUDI FOR FIRST TIME TOLD NY TIMES GINGER (WHO NOT AWARE OF RANDAL FLAP) THAT MERGER DOCUMENT WAS SIGNED IN TETE-A-TETE BETWEEN BOURGUIBA AND QADHAFI BEFORE 1230 JAN 12 OR THREE HOURS BEFORE CEREMONY. MASMOUDI SAID OTHER MEMBERS OF DELEGATION WERE NOT PRESENT AND WERE SHOCKED TO LEARN THIS, INCLUDING HIMSELF. (SAME STORY GIVEN LE MONDE JAN 17 WILL APPEAR IN PARIS NOON JAN 18.)

(D) MASMOUDI SAID HE URGED BOURGUIBA TO INFORM BOUMEDIENE THIS DEVELOPMENT AT ONCE, I.E. BEFORE PUBLIC SIGNING CEREMONY

TO WHICH BOURGUIBA REPLIED THAT HE WOULD DO IT IMMEDIATELY (TOUTE DE SUITE). THIS CARRIED IN FIGARO OF JAN 17.

(E) MASMOUDI INDICATED TO GINGER THAT BOURGUIBA-BOUMEDIENE PHONE CONVERSATION DID NOT TAKE PLACE UNTIL AFTER BOURGUIBA RETURNED TUNIS (MAY NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE REACH BOUMEDIENE FROM JERBA). BOURGUIBA ASKED BOUMEDIENE TO JOIN UNION AND BOUMEDIENE REPLIED " I AM NOT USED TO GETTING ON MOVING CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 TUNIS 00322 181325Z

TRAIN". (TUNIS 290)

(F) JAN 17 CALLED UNSCHEDULED BUREAU POLITIQUE MEETING AFTER SIX HOUR COUNCIL OF MINISTERS MEETING (POSTPONED INTERVIEW WITH GINGER). MASMOUDI DID NOT SHOW UP FOR MEETING BUT WAS THEN CONVOKED. HE WAS INSTRUCTED TO STOP MAKING STATEMENTS TO PRESS.

(G) JAN 18 MASMOUDI INVITED MAJOR WIRE SERVICES WHO HAVE NON-RESIDENT CORRESPONDENTS TO INTERVIEW HIM SEPARATELY. AFP SCHEDULED FOR 1000. REUTERS TO FOLLOW. UPI, WHICH HAS ONLY RESIDENT CORRESPONDENT, WAS DENIED INTERVIEW.

(H) NOUIRA INTERVIEW WITH GINIGER RESCHEDULED FOR 9:00 AM JAN 18 TO BE FOLLOWED BY LE MONDE.

(I) BOURGUIBA (WHO FOREIGN PRESS SEE AS PERSON WHO MIGHT CLARIFY DISPUTE) IN SPITE OF NUMEROUS REQUESTS HAS NOT RECEIVED ANY JOURNALISTS SINCE HIS RETURN TO TUNIS. IT REPORTED HE WILL LEAVE QUIETLY FOR GENEVA ON JAN 19 WITHOUT MAKING ANY PUBLIC STATEMENTS.

3. COMMENT: ESCALATION OF MASMOUDI-NOUIRA FOREIGN PRESS BATTLE, WHICH PROVOKED BY MASMOUDI BUT AIDED BY NOUIRA STATEMENT TO RANDAL, INDICATES VIOLATION OF PROBABLE TACIT OR ACTUAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN KEY ADVISORS INCLUDING MASMOUDI TO EFFECT THAT HIS REMOVAL IN NO WAY RELATED TO MERGER. IT APPEARS THAT NOUIRA WAS FIRST TO VIOLATE THIS AGREEMENT BY PINNING BLAME ON MASMOUDI FOR MERGER. MASMOUDI, IN RETALIATION, CLAIMED THAT HE WAS NOT INVOLVED IN PUSHING MERGER BUT WAS CONFRONTED WITH BOURGUIBA-QADHAFI FAIT ACCOMPLI, WHICH HE SUPPOSEDLY TRIED RECTIFY BY HAVING BOURGUIBA TALK TO BOUMEDIENE BEFORE PUBLIC CEREMONY. FACT MASMOUDI ON JAN 17 (FOUR DAYS AFTER HIS OUSTER) WAS TOLD KEEP QUIET BUT NOT PUT UNDER HOUSE ARREST INDICATES NOUIRA NOT ANXIOUS DISCIPLINE HIM AT THIS TIME. HE MAY BE WAITING FOR MASMOUDI TO IGNORE PARTY POLITICAL BUREAU WARNING

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 TUNIS 00322 181325Z

SO HE WILL HAVE SUFFICIENTLY SERIOUS CASE AGAINST MASMOUDI TO JUSTIFY BUREAU'S APPLYING SANCTIONS. MASMOUDI NO DOUBT RECOGNIZES THIS BUT HE SEEMS BENT ON CONFRONTATION. RECENT FOREIGN PRESS REPORTS, INCLUDING DEPARTMENT STATEMENT, MAY HELP DISCOUNT REPEATED MASMOUDI ALLEGATIONS THAT US INVOLVED IN HIS OUSTER. IN ANY CASE, NOUIRA-MASMOUDI FEUD NOW THREATENS BREAK WIDE OPEN HERE. THIS COULD HAVE SERIOUS REPERCUSSIONS ON INTERNAL SCENE, PARTICULARLY AFTER BOURGUIBA LEAVES FOR GENEVA.

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